

Senator Harry Reid

A Report to Veterans in Nevada

Spring 2003

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Protecting Health Care for Veterans

America makes a commitment to the brave men and women who serve in our armed forces:

In exchange for your willingness to take great risks and make sacrifices to defend our nation, we will take care of you and provide for your health care needs.

Unfortunately, the current Administration is failing to honor this commitment and is denying American veterans the health care they need – and deserve. The President has proposed cutting services and increasing out of pocket costs for veterans. These policies are not necessary, not fair and will not solve the problem.

I am deeply concerned by the reports I hear from veterans in Nevada about their inability to get quality health care. A veteran in North Las Vegas has had his appointment at a VA facility rescheduled 5 times for a total delay of 6 months, and has not yet received a lung scan ordered by a doctor more than a year and a half ago.

A disabled veteran in Reno has been waiting over 18 months for a primary care appointment. He writes that he would not have any medical care if it weren't for Medicare and on a scale of 1 to 10 rates his satisfaction with VA health services a negative 1. This Purple Heart recipient who was wounded in Vietnam says, and I wholeheartedly agree, "It is a sad commentary how the United States government fulfills its commitments and shows its appreciation for veterans."

Another Nevada veteran has not been able to see a doctor despite waiting over a year for an appointment at a VA clinic. He writes, "It appears to me that my paperwork went in a drawer and was forgotten about."

These are not isolated reports limited to just a handful of people or only in Nevada. Far too many of our nation's veterans have the same frustrating experiences. In fact, almost a quarter of a million veterans all over the country have been waiting over 6 months to get an appointment. This figure will rise even higher because demand for services is growing.

I applaud the American Legion, represented by National Commander Ronald Conley, for conducting its "I Am Not a Number" campaign to survey veterans and document their problems getting access to health care.

Instead of helping to alleviate the crisis in veterans health care, the current Administration is making it worse. It has denied 360 thousand veterans of modest income, on average, \$24,000 a year, enrollment in the VA health care system. How are these patriotic Americans going to be able to afford the medical services and prescription drugs they need to remain healthy and live with dignity? Middle income veterans already enrolled will be charged a new \$250 premium and their co-payments for medicine and services will increase. The VA estimates that over a million veterans will seek health care elsewhere as a result. Pricing veterans out of the VA health care system is not the way to reduce the backlog in cases.

If the VA allowed veterans to fill prescriptions written by outside doctors we could reduce the time veterans must



Senator Harry Reid held a news conference on March 5th in Washington, D.C. to call for better health care and more resources for America's veterans. At the news conference Reid was joined by four American Legion members from Nevada (left to right): Fred Anderson from Fallon, Tod Jennings from Carson City, Dale and Pat Salmen from Round Mountain, and Reid.

wait, free up VA doctors for other appointments, reduce the backlog and alleviate the strains on the system. We would also actually save money. Under current policy, the

federal government has to pay twice for a doctor's visit if the veteran is covered under Medicare. This is an unnecessary waste of money.

The President's budget reflects his true priorities. Congress approved \$417 million in supplemental funding to address the VA's operating deficit and to fulfill our responsibility to those who have defended our nation. The President decided not to fully support health care for middle income veterans and instead proposed an irresponsible package of hundreds of billions of dollars in giveaways to wealthy stock market investors. He might say the right things about supporting veterans, but his rhetoric does not translate into results.

As our nation now sends tens of thousands of brave young men and women in uniform into harm's way in Iraq and continues our war against terrorism around the world, we must give our troops the full support they need to succeed. We can also send them a strong message that their service is appreciated and that the government will remember their service by upholding the covenant made with previous generations of soldiers.

I will continue to fight on behalf of all of the veterans in Nevada and across America to make sure they receive the quality health care they need. I know I can count on the American Legion and other veterans groups as allies. And I will work with my colleagues to honor our nation's commitment.

Reid Calls Nevadans to Unite in Support of Our Troops in Iraq

Earlier this month, the men and women of our armed forces, with the help of British and Australian soldiers, began military operations to disarm Saddam Hussein and remove his brutal regime from power. This operation is not without risk, but the American military is the best fight-

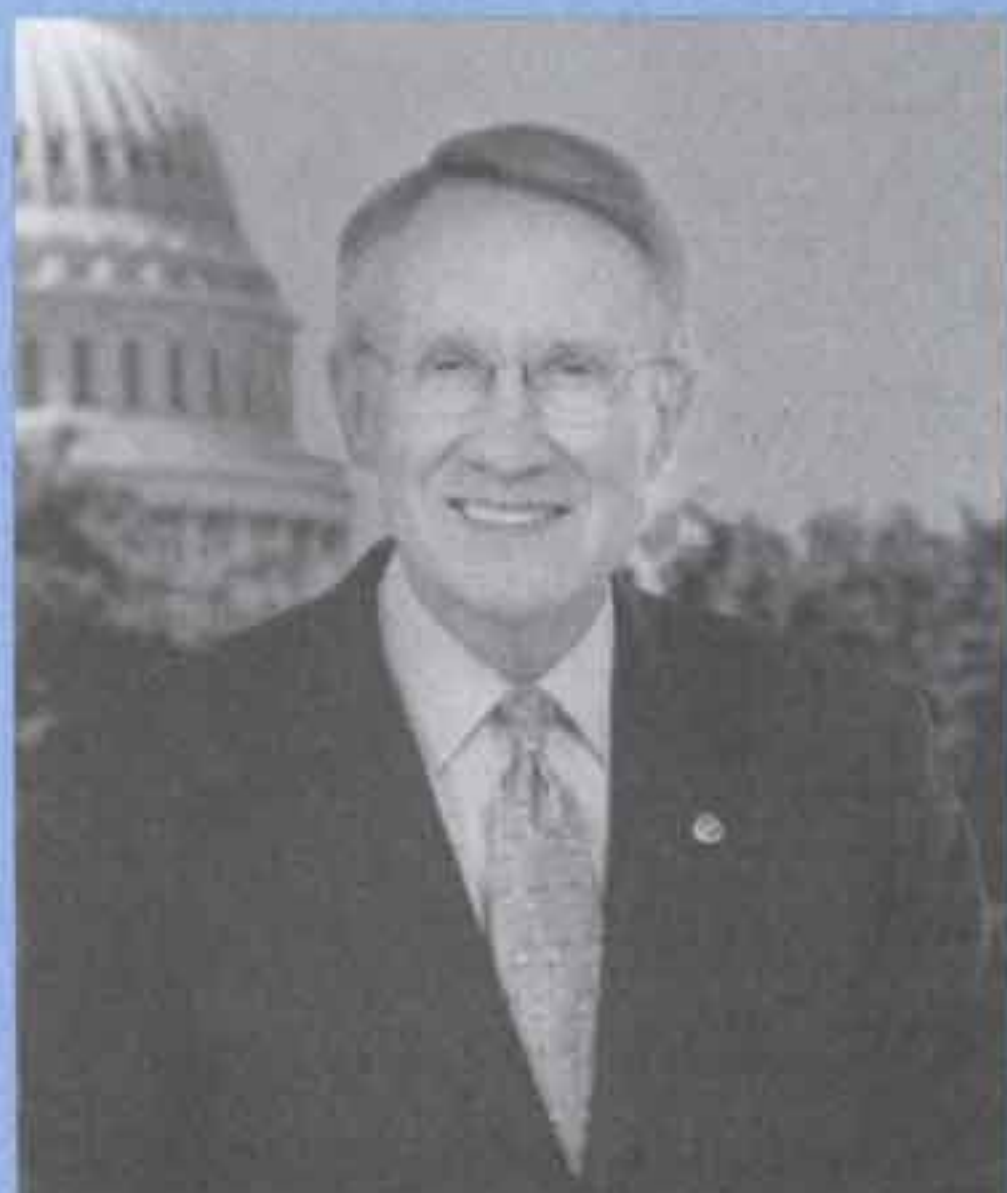
ing force ever assembled and I am confident our troops will bring about a decisive victory. We pray for their safety and wish them a speedy return to their families and friends. We also stand united with our Commander-in-Chief, as he leads the nation through this difficult period. I will do everything in my power to ensure the Congress fully funds and supports the needs of our troops. We must also continue with our diplomatic efforts in assembling a coalition to share in the burden of post-war reconstruction and development.

Today we stand united, with one voice, in supporting our troops and in swiftly defeating Saddam Hussein. We must remain vigilant here at home to guard against the possibility of terrorist reprisals, but I am confident that peaceful times lie ahead. Certainly, peace and freedom lie on the horizon for the Iraqi people.



Senator Harry Reid accepts the Colonel Arthur T. Marix Congressional Leadership Award for 2002 from the Military Officers Association of America for his efforts on concurrent receipt.

KEEPING IN TOUCH



Please feel free to contact me or my staff offices with questions or concerns you might have regarding these or any other issues. We value your input and stand ready to work with you.

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